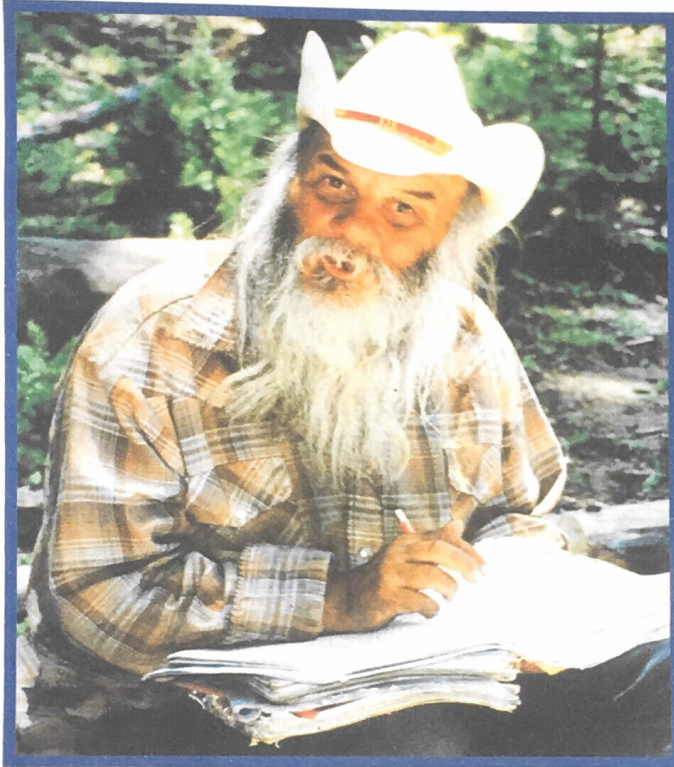


Rainbow Family Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.
Interviews with Rainbow
Family of Living Light
folks conducted between
1977 and 2008.
Scanned in 2018.
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15.A HENRY THE FIDDLER - "The Rainbow Networker"
- interviewed in 1983 in Crestone, CO

Henry The Fiddler

1

The Rainbow Networker

(The best Fiddler I've ever heard - Monte Tidwell wrote of Henry in his diary of the 1977 Gathering. Henry gave this interview to me in October, 1983 in Crestone, Colorado. Henry is also very interested in computers.)

I was born in Chicago May 1, 1949. Most of my dad's life, he was an inventor. The official title was research engineer. He designed machines. My mother was a social worker and a school teacher. I have two younger sisters, Debbie and Sandra.

I was raised in the Jewish atheist religion. It's not a religion, it's a culture of people who don't believe in God. They just used the synagogue for social purposes - meeting people. My mother was an officer of the Communist Party of Illinois and she dragged my father into it. They tried to keep it from us kids. A lot of Communists were getting arrested then and they didn't want us kids to worry.

I lived in Evanston, a Chicago suburb. I started five years of piano lessons when I was seven. I started violin lessons when I was nine. I think I studied violin all told for about five and a half years. Three of those were with a professor from Northwestern University. I didn't want to be a music guy. I thought musicians were poor. I wanted to make a lot of money. My freshman year of high school, I got into computers.

I didn't go to college. I flunked all my courses my senior year of high school and couldn't get into college.

I enlisted in the Army. I did it to spite my parents. I was a redneck in those days. I flew to the Pentagon before I went in to make sure that I could be a computer programmer there. I talked to some colonels.

But I couldn't be a computer programmer in the

Pentagon because my parents were Communists. The FBI had a big file on them. I was in the Army at Fort Leonard Wood for two years. For a year and a half of that I was under investigation, so they couldn't send me to Nam. I programmed the payroll computers at Leonard Wood, then I was a clerk typist. I got fat in the Army. I guess if I thought back, I could find some hard moments, but most of my time in the Army was like a summer camp. The Army's a soft outfit, pretty inefficient.

I saved up my leave time and at the end of my time in the service, I hopped a military aircraft, all the way to Israel. I had an old friend there and I wanted to visit him. I had four days left in the Army when I got back. I got out in August, 1970.

I went to Washington DC and tried to get something going in computers there, but that was the first big recession in the computer business. They had programmers walking the streets, driving cabs.

So I found myself a job as a second-shift carpenter up in Bethesda, Maryland. I lasted a couple of months until the company I was working for went under.

See, when I was in the Army, I was very straight. I thought all these hippies and counter-culture and long-hairs and marijuana and LSD and Jefferson Airplane was for the birds. I remember I was in the Port Authority bus terminal in New York right before my end of term of service and some hippie-looking people were passing out literature. I said, "Well, listen, if you want to change things, why don't you write your Senator or Congressman?"

I had a vested interest in being straight while I was

In the Army. I thought if I was going to worry about all the things these people were worrying about, I better wait till I get out.

When I got out of the Army, I had no need to continue to think that way. I went to a demonstration in Washington, DC. I found myself standing in this park. I still had real short hair and an Army field jacket. It was at night. I just stood around feeling alienated from everyone I saw there. I didn't feel a part of what was going on, but I felt there was nothing to keep me from considering what these people were thinking about. Not much came from that.

So I went back to Chicago. I looked up some of my old friends. One of them was working for Standard Oil. He says, "Well, we'll give you a job."

So I started working on this computer job at Standard Oil. I found all my old friends had moved into a neighborhood called Lincoln Park, which was where it was happening. There was a newspaper called the Seed right upstairs from a coffee house called Alice's Revisited. On 2440 North Lincoln was the Wobbly Hall. We used to have community meetings there every week and all the hippies used to sit around in a circle and talk.

Huey Newton came to speak at the Cow Palace at the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention. I remember the awe I felt seeing Huey Newton standing on the stage flanked by two black guards. A lot of people came to hear him. While I was sitting there listening to Huey talk, I had the same feeling I had at the demonstration in DC. I was alienated. I didn't feel a part of what was happening, but I was impressed. At the end of the talk by Huey, some of the Black Panther Party Minister of Defense people were standing at

the entrance with coffee cans. I recall putting in a \$5 bill. I thought "Oh well, these people are doing something. May as well help them out."

That was the first time I had noticed my sympathies in the direction of the Movement. I started reading the Seed and becoming more in tune with the ideas of these hippies. In February, 1971, I decided I would not cut my hair. So I was a little bit of a paradox. Here I was working for Standard Oil and letting my hair grow.

I rented myself an apartment in Lincoln Park. I got the idea I'd start a little commune of my own. I rented rooms to a couple of local hippies who were total slob. I found out that living with other people was not that easy. I tried that for eight months, and it was pretty boring. I couldn't find other people I could live with.

I started noticing that people were living on food stamps and welfare and unemployment, which was kind of a new concept to me. I was used to working for a living. It turned out to be a drag. I had to go to work in the morning. Then in the evening I'd go over to my friends and they'd drop LSD, smoke pot and the Jefferson Starship was playing constantly.

In April, 1971, there was talk about a big demonstration called May Day where people would go to Washington DC and block the bridges so people couldn't get to work. Also as part of that action there was gonna be a big rock concert in West Potomac Park. I heard the Beach Boys were going to be playing at May Day and Joan Baez and a lot of big names. So I was real interested in going because I had been playing my fiddle in Lincoln Park and I knew what a gas it was to play my fiddle in the park. I didn't think I could go to DC because I had a job.

The week before May Day there was growing unrest in

DC. A bunch of Vietnam veterans came and threw their medals away. I remember reading in the newspaper that a bunch of vets in wheelchairs were wheeling themselves by the White House, holding candles.

So I started to get excited about going to DC, but I couldn't figure out how to go. One day was the clincher. I saw Pete Seeger on TV at a demonstration in Washington. I had been a fan of Pete's for years. I thought, "Well, shit, I might be able to go to Washington and run into Pete and hear him play."

So I decided I had to go. I was going to turn 22 on May 1. I still had my United Airline card. If you were under 22 with that, you could fly half price. So I went down to the O'Hare Airport and hopped on a flight for DC. I guess to this day that was the greatest weekend of my life.

I got out in DC and took a cab to the Jefferson Memorial. I walked to West Potomac Park and found my friends from Chicago who had come in their van. That night I must have played my fiddle all night. I don't think I ever had so much fun before. I was playing for people. They were dancing, singing, shouting, screaming, clapping. At that time I first realized I could turn people on by playing the fiddle.

I got the name Henry the Fiddler that weekend. When I got out of the Army, I kept my helmet liner. I had this idea that when people were in anti-war marches, they wore helmets painted with peace symbols. So right before DC, I went to the dime store and bought some paint and had a friend who was an artist paint my helmet. He painted it blue and wrote THE FIDDLER on the back and HENRY on the front. I figured, "Well, that is a good enough name." I finally laid down at five o'clock in the morning when

the cops came along and kicked everybody out of the park. That was Sunday morning. It was kind of a rude awakening. For most folks, bodles everywhere in sleeping bags, and these loud-speakers came on. "Be advised, this is the Washington DC police. The permit for this gathering has been revoked." The tactic was to break out people so they would go home and not block the bridges the next day, May 2.

I was hanging out with the Chicago group. We went over to Georgetown University. People were congregating there. One of my friends had a bicycle. I hopped on it and went around Georgetown enjoying myself. I rode back where we had parked by the dormitories of the university. All of a sudden I heard a voice singing. It was unmistakably the voice of Pete Seeger and his banjo. He was standing on a balcony of the dormitory singing through a stereo system some students had rigged up.

Pete Seeger was definitely one of my heroes. Many years earlier he had appeared on the Smothers Brothers comedy hour and sang a song called "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy." I tape recorded that song off the television show and I used to listen to it constantly in my Chicago apartment. I'd play it and rewind my tape and play it again. I just loved it.

So here I was in Georgetown University within yards of my idol, Pete Seeger. I had my violin with me on the bicycle. At that point I got the biggest adrenalin rush I think I've ever gotten in my life. I could tell that Pete Seeger was on his last tune as I rode up. The crowd started applauding wildly. I knew if the impossible was gonna happen, I had to act immediately.

So I threw this bicycle down. I held my fiddle case up at port arms. There must have been at least 50 to 100 yards of people between me and Pete Seeger at the moment. However, that was not about to stop me.

7
I proceeded to crash through the crowd with my fiddle at port arms, pushing people aside. I was yelling at people to get aside, not stopping to apologize. About 45 seconds later, I found myself standing at a small clearing with a microphone and I didn't see Pete Seeger there. So I yelled, "Where's Pete?"

At which time people pointed to a man zipping up his banjo case about four feet from me. He looked up at me. I don't think I've ever found out from Pete to this day what he thought. I said "Pete - you can't leave without playing 'The Big Muddy' with me."

I don't recall being in my body. I was moved by some outside force. Automatic pilot had taken over. Two seconds later, Pete Seeger started to zip his zipper in the other direction on his banjo case. I realized that what wasn't even a dream was gonna come true. I got my fiddle out and said, "Pete, give me an A." He said, "No, you give me an A, Henry." Pretty soon we were tuned up and ready to go.

So I stepped up to the mike and talked to the crowd, who already knew who I was because they had seen me playing at the rock concert. And I told them how Pete was my idol and this was my favorite tune, "The Big Muddy." Pete Seeger and I stood up to one single lone mike and played that tune together and we'd never played a tune together before or spoken a word to each other before in our lives. We just got up to that mike and did it. And it came off pretty damn good.

The crowd was just breaking out. It was a song about Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War and it fit right in with the whole energy of the weekend. People were clapping and yelling and hooting and hollering when the punch lines in the song came up. They were cheering and it was great.

When we got done playing that song, they were just applauding wildly. I really didn't get to exchange hardly a word with Pete. I think I had an opportunity to tell him how I'd heard him as a kid in my home town. He zipped up his banjo case and waved goodbye and strutted off.

And there I was standing in the middle of this crowd. There had been a bunch of photographers taking our picture as we were playing. Then afterwards I tracked one of them down and got him to send me a picture. The incident was one of my treasured moments.

Then I left that scene. It was getting towards time to be heading back for Chicago. I was riding on a cloud ten miles high for having played with Pete. So I hitched a ride down to the airport and got on the next plane for Chicago. They charged me extra money because I had bought my round trip ticket on my youth card and I turned 22 over the weekend. So I went back to Chicago—I was on the same plane with Dick Gregory as I recall. Over the years since then I have run into Pete several times and become close friends.

When I got back to Chicago, I became increasingly disillusioned. Here I was noticing how much fun I was having playing music for people in the park and at rock concerts. I had a new name. I had a new identity. But I was working for a living and I wasn't particularly enjoying it.

All my friends were dropped out and they had taken off for the summer traveling from California to Europe to India and here I was stuck in Chicago. I had to go to work every day. And I realized that was bullshit because I saw all these other people were living on welfare and food stamps. And I said, "Why should I be doing this? I'm just as smart and creative as the rest of them."

So I started figuring out how I could quit my job and hit the road too. I was getting real frustrated with my job and I knew I couldn't continue working, but I didn't want to live on welfare. I wanted to have some other way to buy food on the road. There was an art fair in the neighborhood where I lived around the beginning of August. The fair was on a residential street and I was wandering up and down the street playing my fiddle and looking at paintings.

Some people invited me to play on the steps of their house. They were all sitting on the porch. I went up to the porch and played a couple of tunes. Presently one of them reached in their pocket and pulled out some change and gave me a couple of quarters. I said to myself "Hm! I just made 50 cents without even trying." I didn't even ask for 50 cents. I wondered what would happen if I did try.

If I stood out on the street where there was a lot of people and I had a little tip can that said DONATIONS then maybe I could make enough money to live on. So I went home and I brainstormed this whole idea of getting a coffee can and painting it up the same way I had my helmet painted. I didn't want to write the word DONATIONS because I had the idea I might get busted. I thought, well, if I just write my name, HENRY THE FIDDLER on it with a slot on top, if I ever got hauled into jail, I could tell the judge, "Well, I wasn't panhandling. That was just a little can I wear to store my personal belongings."

So I made up this little can, put HENRY THE FIDDLER on the top, put a string around it. I went out two weeks later to another art fair. Within the first two minutes I was standing on the street, a little old lady came along and listened to a tune, reached in her purse and dropped

some money in the can. I said "Aha! It's working."
Then a policeman came and saw her while she was taking the money out of her purse and putting it in my can. Instead of busting me or telling me that I couldn't do that, he put a big smile on his face and said, "Hey! It looks like you got a pretty good thing going there."

So I played all that afternoon in New Town and then I got on my bicycle and rode down to Rush Street which is the night club part of Chicago and I played all night down at Rush Street. I got home and I counted and I had \$17 in my can. I said "Hot dog! I got it hooked!"

So I called up my boss and I said, "Hey, I'm quitting. I'll see you later. I'm going to go hitchhike around the country and play my fiddle on the street."

He went, "What? You're gonna what?"

I said, "You heard me, Phil. I'm gonna quit my job. See you later."

So I packed all my stuff up, went down and got a back pack and a sleeping bag, gave all my junk away to my friends, said, "Keep track of this stuff, I may need it again. I might come back if doesn't work, but if it does, you can just have it or I'll sell it to you."

So I took off and started hitch hiking 4:15 p.m., October 12, 1971 at the corner of Fullerton and Sheffield. Well, I guess that my second career lasted about four years. I hitch hiked all over the United States, covered about 60,000 miles, went across the United States twice a year. I wintered in San Francisco three of those four years and the fourth year in Santa Fe. I played at all kinds of fiddle contests and street corners, went to a lot of folk festivals, met people on the road. They turned me onto things. I heard about events from different people.

And I was kind of part way into music and part way into the counter-culture. You know, New Age communities and peace and saving the planet and all that stuff. I was into just about everything that there was to be into. I was just a wide-eyed kid. I was real arrogant. I had a big ego about me because I was pretty good at turning people on.

So I got to thinking I was pretty good. I started winning fiddle contests and getting trophies and ribbons and sending them home to my parents, got written up in some newspaper articles here and there. I remember hearing about the first gathering. I was in Washington DC and these people came up and they say, "Hey, there's gonna be a big gathering out in Colorado and all these people are gonna be there. It's gonna be really neat."

And I said, "Well, that sounds pretty nice, but it also sounds like it might be pretty cold."

I wasn't into being cold. I was into being east when the gathering was, anyway. So I didn't go to the Granby, Colorado, Gathering. Then after Granby I ran into all these people on the road and they said, "Man, it was great! It was a little muggy, you know, and a little cold but it was great. There were all these people there. All these women were dancing naked and people were just hanging out in the woods." It sounded like a pretty interesting affair.

I think part of the reason why I didn't go to it originally was I heard it was religious people, and I wasn't too much interested in religion. I didn't know what spirituality was. I was an atheist in those days. So I kind of stayed away because of that.

One thing that did attract me was I heard there was no stage and that anybody could perform and I was getting kind of frustrated in those days because I felt like I wanted to perform a lot and yet I wasn't on the billing at a lot of these festivals. And I liked the idea of a place where you

could go and there wasn't any big name performer, where just the people were performing. That appealed to me.

So in 1974 when the gathering was in Utah, it was the first year that I actually tried to go. I got the wrong information and ended up in Demez Springs, New Mexico, instead of Enterprise, Utah, where the gathering really was held. And that really pissed me off and I thought, "God, this thing is really ridiculous. So many rumors and people that are putting out misinformation. You can't even find this thing."

So I pretty much made a resolution that I was gonna help the Rainbow Gathering the next year and try and get in touch with the people that were organizing it and put some energy into organizing it so that people could find it.

So I worked on the Arkansas Gathering up there with Rainbow Atma in Ponca, Arkansas in 1975 and put a lot of energy into it, got an article in Mother Earth News - helped out the Apple Annie clan down in Bisbee and over in Austin getting money together for getting up to Arkansas to help set up the gathering. Matter of fact, I think I was the first one in the state - no, Rainbow Atma was the first one. I was the second one. I hitch hiked in March to Rainbow Atma's place. The leaves weren't even on the trees yet. We sent out a lot of information on the gathering.

Me and Michael Sun were heading up from Little Rock to the Arkansas pre-gathering council in an old van called Yeller, the second week of April. That was the first year we had a spring council.

I looked out the window and saw this guy with a backpack in downtown Little Rock and I assumed he was going to the Rainbow Gathering. It was Freedom.

So I asked him, "Do you want to go to the gathering?" Freedom said, "what's that?"

I said, "The Rainbow Gathering - hop in and you'll find out."

And he said, "OK."

He stayed and hung out until the gathering with the rest of the clan and I split - flew the coop.

That was one of the worst years in terms of relations with the local police. So I was worried about getting busted, to be quite frank with you, cause I'd heard stories about the way they came in to bust the people at the Colorado Gathering and they missed them by half an hour. And I did not feel like going to jail for whatever I had done my part in the Arkansas Gathering. So I split the state in May or June or something like that.

I went to Washington DC and then I heard that the gathering came off fine after all and that there had been a few arrests. So I didn't actually go to the gathering.

My first gathering, I finally actually made it to the gathering in Montana in 1976, and you know, been coming ever since.

After the summer of '75, I'd been on the road for four years and I decided it was time for a change. About that time I was feeling like writing a book about my experiences, a book about fiddling and I was thinking that I couldn't really write a book. I was also thinking about recording a record album. And I couldn't really do any of these things with just a back pack and a briefcase.

I felt like I needed a school bus to live in, something where I could have more possessions - a typewriter or a tape recorder or whatever. And so Don Moser sold me his bus and I started around doing a school bus trip. I got a couple of friends out on the road with me and we started playing college concerts to make money. A little commune on wheels, I guess you could call it.

But it didn't work out too well. I was too much of a control freak.

I played college concerts for about a year and a half as far east as New York, as far north as North Dakota, as far south as Kingsville, Texas, as far west as Gunnison, Colorado. And during that period of time, I cut my one and only record album live at the Fiddlers' Grove Festival in Union Grove, North Carolina. I made about 3,000 copies of the record and sold them along the way.

I lost a lot of money on the college concert tour. I had the wrong booking agent. I had too few gigs, so they didn't pay enough money and they were too far apart. One thing led to another and I lost a lot of money doing that, so I folded up the operation in April, 1978 - right before the Oregon Gathering. At that time I was in debt and I needed a place to stay and rejuvenate and relax and get off the road and figure out what I was going to do with the rest of my life.

So after the Oregon Gathering, I went up and lived with the Love Family for about six months. They took care of me and helped me to regain some perspective on my life and what I wanted to do. After being with them for six months, I realized I wasn't going to join the Love Family. I ended up taking a bunch of the Love Family down to set up the Arizona Gathering in the spring of '79.

After that, I moved to Boulder and had all these debts to pay off. I got myself a job programming computers again. Of course, computers had changed. I'd been out of computers for eight years and they'd changed quite a bit. For instance all these micro-computers that I didn't know a thing about. But basically computers were about the same.

I landed in Boulder in the Fall of '79. So I've been

In Boulder ever since, doing computer programming, learning about computers and looking at the way computers can be used in communities to build resource exchange networks. I realized people can store information in computer discs pertaining to resources and skills that they have. People can locate these same resources and skills at a later time by interrogating the computer.

I guess since 1979 I've gotten into a pretty right-wing conservative bent. I'm part conservative and part hippie these days. I got of got sick, I guess, after eight years of all the hippie New Age transformation stuff. I decided that there must be some other people on the planet that think about other things and maybe a well-rounded person would not isolate himself or herself to just one world view.

So I started reading what the conservatives and the survivalists had to say. I started getting into gold and silver and food storage and different things like that in 1979. And now I'm pretty much into both New Age ideas and also conservative old world ideas because I think they're both needed to heal this planet. I'm out of the musical gig. I haven't really been doing much work for the last few years. I'm still involved pretty heavily in networking the Rainbow Gatherings. I'm planning on moving to Seattle pretty quick and starting a computerized network up there.

The Love Family has been going through some major changes here recently [1983]. There's a lot of people who have left the Love Family over the course of the years. I don't think that we should consider that to be the end of the relationship between those people who are out of the Family. All it is, is a gradual transition from a hierarchical structure to a horizontal network-type structure and I

want to enhance that by putting out a newsletter to connect the members of the Family who have left, so they can maintain their connection, even though they're not in the Love Family proper. I

It's gonna be a networking process where we put out a first newsletter and ask everybody to write in and tell us the addresses of people that they know of that they still in communication with or ideas as to where they might have settled - also to send in the names of people that maybe other people have forgotten about. To track people down, I imagine, may take between two and five years, to get that network assembled again - like Humpty Dumpty.

Michael John's Rainbow Nation Guide is of limited value, because the people who sign into the Guide are in general fairly transient people and they're not in one place long enough to make that guide of value. A lot of energy goes into producing the Guide and it's usually of value for at most a few months after it's printed because everybody moves the next year.

I did start this Rainbow networking this year at the Michigan Gathering where we're gonna have a Rainbow Networkers Tribe. It's not a physical tribe that sits in one place or hangs out together. It's a decentralized tribe. It's a tribal communication between people who are into networking and communications for Rainbow. It's a tribe who I hope will be fairly committed to keeping their addresses known even when they move so we can keep in touch over the years, to be something that will last and be more permanent.

Johnny Light and I are working on a newsletter for that purpose. We put together a little booklet which should be coming out soon of all the people who are signed into the Networkers Tribe. The

booklet is nothing but the addresses and the purpose of putting the booklet out is just so everybody in the tribe will know who the other people are and where they're located. Networking is gonna be done via a newsletter. Garrick is in the Networkers Tribe.

Michael John does not print newsletters, he just prints a guide. The newsletter is gonna be a thing where anybody in the tribe can write in with an idea, sort of like a decentralized council. If you could say, "Let's have a council that would go 365 days a year and not stop," that's what the Networkers Tribe is.

It's a decentralized kind of council where people can continue to bring up ideas in the newsletter and writing in to the newsletter with their responses or counter-ideas. So we can continue our counselling process all year long and by doing so, Rainbow can generate at a much more efficient level. Things can be accomplished much more quickly.

Ever since I started being more than just a fiddle player at the gathering, Barry has been threatened. Barry doesn't even know what networking is. He doesn't possess the skills to be a good networker. He possesses other wonderful skills that are basic to the gathering. We both have strong egos and there's a big ego clash. He has a different idea of what the gathering should be than I do. He's basically a politician - a radical politician.

You know, it took us ten years just to figure out some very basic things. I don't think we can afford to move so slowly in the future. We want to really get this Rainbow thing into high gear in the next ten years, where we become a prime force on this planet.

So far, Rainbow is seen as a counter-cultural hippie aberration, a weirdness, not very powerful and not

efficient at conducting business and affairs. And that's true. Rainbow is just a big party right now. It could be much more. It has the potential to be a dynamic force for change. But before a lot of the powerful people on the planet plug into Rainbow, they're gonna have to see Rainbow getting its act together.

The Michigan Gathering was very efficient, but that's all relative. It's just like how big is big or how small is small. You and I are very big in comparison with the smallest ant, but you and I are very small in comparison with the planet Jupiter. So we can talk about how efficient the gathering was, but there's no need to rest on our laurels. It's very inefficient in comparison with what it could be - 20 to 50 times more efficient in terms of making connections, of being useful in helping people reach whatever goals they've set for themselves in their life.

I'm working on the level of most critical interest to me and to a lot of other people who aren't presently coming to The gathering. That is, the business of making connections and learning things and disseminating information. There is a lot of people who can't afford to come to the gathering because it is not productive to them time and money-wise to come in its present form. It won't be until the gathering can be more useful to them. So we lose a lot of people because it's not useful to them in its present form.

Change in the gathering is slow.

(At the 1990 Minnesota Gathering, Henry played his fiddle enthusiastically for a large crowd as TV cameras rolled)

Dear Garrick -

Hear are the words of Henry the Fiddler - a good example of what you call a techno-Rainbow - with all the strengths and problems that kind of brother has with the gatherings.

I will try to stay in touch as much as possible. Greetings and love to Jennie, Joanie, Eden Star, Isha, Tameron, Mariba Robin, Santori and the whole gang at the Farm.

It's great being settled down for a while. I'll appreciate next year's gathering so much more.

I will try to get in touch with Troy and Carmen and Gypsy Tripper who have put on a couple of Rainbow Baster Fairs here in Oklahoma.

Love
Jody

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